

# The Traveler and the Peasant



Lev Tolstoy

# **The Traveler and the Peasant**

**by Lev Tolstoy**

In a peasant hut. An old traveler sits and reads a book. Owner returns from his work, sits down for dinner and offers food to the traveler. Traveler refuses. The owner eats dinner. After finishing dinner, he gets up, prays, and sits close to the old man.

The peasant:

- So, what, the occasion?...

The traveler (removes glasses, puts down the book):

- There's no train, only tomorrow will come. It's too crowded at the station. I asked your woman to let me spend the night here. She let me it.

The peasant:

- Well, that's OK, stay over.

The traveler:

- Thank you. Well, how do you live at the present time?

The peasant:

- What is our life? The worst!

The traveler:

- Why is it so?

The peasant:

- That's because of the way the life is. Our life is like this: could be worse, but can't be. I have nine souls here at home, and all of them want to eat, but the space is six measures, so live here as we can. Whether I want it or not, have to go to live with people. But when you want to get hired, the labor is cheap. The rich do with us all they want. The people have multiplied, yet the land has not increased, and they keep adding taxes, you know. Taxes on rent and on upkeep, and on land, and on bridges, and insurance, and to the guards, and on food – can't recount all of them, and there also the priests, and all that. Everybody rides on us, only the lazy one doesn't.

The traveler:

- But I thought that the common folks began to live well.

The peasant:

- Began to live so well that stay without food for days.

The traveler:

- I thought that because they began to throw too much money.

The peasant:

- What money to throw? You're saying strange things. People die of starvation, but he says: 'throw money'.

The traveler:

- But at the same time newspapers tell that last year seven hundred million, - and a million is a thousand of thousand rubles, - so seven hundred million was spent on wine by the common folks.

The peasant:

- Yes but are we the only ones who drink? Take a look, as priests suck it, like fish.

The traveler:

- All that is a small part, but for the most part the common folks are accounted.

The peasant:

- So what, and don't need to drink already?

The traveler:

- No, I meant that if seven hundred million are madly thrown on wine each year, it appears that they live not too bad yet. It's no joke - seven hundred million, hard to pronounce that.

The peasant:

- Yes but how to live without it? It is not us who started it, and it's not up to us to end; the coronation, and the wedding, and the funeral services, and the bribes: like it or not, you cannot do without it. It is a custom.

The traveler:

- But there are people who don't drink. And live somehow. And it's little good in it anyway.

The peasant:

- What's good, only bad!

The traveler:

- So, do not need to drink it.

The peasant:

- Drink or don't drink, still there is not enough money to live. And there's no land. If we had land, we could live, but we don't have it.

The traveler:

- How come there isn't? Is it too little? Wherever you turn, the land is everywhere.

The peasant:

- Land is land, but it is not ours! The elbow is close, yet you can't bite it!

The traveler:

- Not yours? Whose is it?

The peasant:

- Whose? You know whose. There he is, the fat-bellied devil, captured one thousand seven hundred acres, and all is not enough for him, but we have already quit keeping chickens – there's no enough place to let them go. The same will be with the cattle. There's no feed. And once our calf walks onto his field – he immediately charges us for that, requires to sell all you have left but give to him.

The traveler:

- Yes but what does he need so much land for?

The peasant:

- What does he need land for? It's known for what: he sows, reaps, sells, and puts money in the bank.

The traveler:

- But how he manages to till this whole Palestine?

The peasant:

- You're like a little kid. That's what he has money for, to hire workers, and

they plow and harvest.

The traveler:

- And the workers, I bet, are also out of your own people?

The peasant:

- Some are ours, others - strangers.

The traveler:

- Yes but all are from the peasants?

The peasant:

- Clearly, of our brother. Who except us men will work? Obviously, they are all common folks.

The traveler:

- What if they wouldn't go to work for him.

The peasant:

- Go or don't go, he still won't give. The land will be vacant, but to give - he won't. He is like a dog guarding the hay, doesn't eat itself, and doesn't let others eat it.

The traveler:

- But how will he guard the land? In fact, it's about five kilometers? How would he manage to guard it?

The peasant:

- Your talk is funny. While he lies on his side, grows his belly, his guards do that.

The traveler:

- And the guards, I bet, are again from your own people?

The peasant:

- And who else, sure thing, they're from our own.

The traveler:

- This means that the common men themselves work on the land for the noblemen, and guard it from themselves, too?

The peasant:

- What else to do?

The traveler:

- What to do is not to work for him and not to go into guards, then the land would be free. The land is of God, and the people are of God - till, sow, harvest, as much as everyone needs.

The peasant:

- To have a strike, then? For that, brother, they have soldiers there. They'll send soldiers, one-two-fire! – and the soldiers will shoot some people and will arrest the others. There's a short conversation with the soldiers.

The traveler:

- But the soldiers are also from your own? Why would they shoot their own people?

The peasant:

- Because of the oath, that's why.

The traveler:

- The oath? And what is the oath?

The peasant:

- Are you not Russian? Oath – there's one word – the oath.

The traveler:

- Meaning they swear?

The peasant:

- How else? Swear on the cross, on the Bible: for the throne and the fatherland, they must give their own lives.

The traveler:

- And to my mind, don't need to do that.

The peasant:

- What don't need?

The traveler:

- Don't need to give oaths.

The peasant:

- But how is it no need, if the law requires?

The traveler:

- No, the law does not have it. The law of Christ explicitly prohibits it: do not swear, it says, at all.

The peasant:



- Really? And what about the priests?

The traveler (takes the book, opens it, searches and reads):

- "You're told: keep your vows, but I say - don't swear at all. But let your word be "yes, yes", "no, no," and all that is beyond this, is from the evil one" (Matthew ch. V, art. 33, 38). Meaning that by Christ's law you cannot swear.

The peasant:

- If they won't swear, there won't be any soldiers.

The traveler:

- But what are they for, the soldiers?

The peasant:

- How come for what? And what if other kings will go onto our king, what's then?

The traveler:

- Kings argue themselves, so let themselves to figure out.

The peasant:

- Wow! And how's that?

The traveler:

- And that's how - who believes in God, that one, no matter what he'll be told, he won't kill people.

The peasant:

- Then why do the priest in the church reads the decree that the war was

declared, and so that standby soldiers should be getting ready?

The traveler:

- I don't know about this, but I know that in the commandments – in the sixths one - directly says: thou shalt not kill. Prohibited, it means, for a person to kill a person.

The peasant:

- It means at home. But at war - how to do without it? I mean, there are enemies.

The traveler:

- According to the Christ's Gospel, there are no enemies, it's commanded to love everyone. (Opens the Gospel and searches.)

The peasant:

- Come on, read it to me!

Traveler (reading):

- "You have heard that it was said to the ancients: thou shalt not kill; who kills, shall be liable to the judgment. But I say unto you, that whosoever is angry with a brother shall be liable to judgment." It's also said: "You have heard that it was said: you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you: love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for them who despises you and persecutes you" (Matthew ch. V, art. 43, 44).

Prolonged silence.

The peasant:

- Well, and how about taxes? Also not to give?

The traveler:

- It is as you know. If your children are hungry, so obviously, feed your own first.

The peasant:

- So, then, don't need to have soldiers?

The traveler:

- And what the hell do we need them for? Millions of millions they collect from you, it's no joke to feed this Horde. There are millions of these parasites, and the only use from them is that you're not allowed to have land or you'll be shot.

Peasant (sighs and shakes his head).

- That's true. I wish all would do it at once. Yet, if only one or two persons will resist, they'll be shot or sent to Siberia, and that's be the end of their talks.

The traveler:

- But there are people now, young guys, who, one by one, yet stand behind the law of God, and don't go into soldiers: cannot, they say, according to the law of Christ, to be a murderer. Do what you want, but I will not take a gun in my hands.

The peasant:

- Oh, and then what?

The traveler:

- They get imprisoned - sit there, sweethearts, by three, four years. And some say that they are doing well there, because their bosses are also people and respect them. And others get even released – they're told that they're no good

because their health is weak. But, in fact, this kind of guy is just like a sore thumb for them, doesn't suit them, and therefore – management is afraid to take someone like him, because he'll tell others that serving as a soldier is against the law of God. And so he gets released.

The peasant:

- Really?

The traveler:

- Sometimes they get released, but other times they die in there. But in soldiers they die, also, and get injured – some return without leg, some without arm...

The peasant:

- Wow, you're such a lawyer. It'd be good that way but it won't work.

The traveler:

- Why not?

The peasant:

- That's because...

The traveler:

- Because of what?

The peasant:

- Because of the power given to the bosses.

The traveler:

- But the bosses have the tower just because you listen to them. Don't listen to

your superiors, and they won't have the power.

Peasant (shakes his head):

- How strangely you speak. How can we be without bosses? It's impossible to be without management.

The traveler:

- Knowingly, it's impossible. But only who are you going to consider your bosses: a man or God? Who you want to listen to: a man or God?

The peasant:

- It's needless to say. No one is higher than God. The first thing is to live Godly.

The traveler:

- And it to live Godly, need to listen to God, and not the people. And once you start living according to God, you won't drive people away from the land, won't go into police, won't rip taxes from people, won't go into guards, officers, and above all, won't go into soldiers, won't promise to kill people.

The peasant:

- And how about the shaggy priests? They know that it's not according to the law, and yet why they don't teach how it must be?

The traveler:

- I don't know about that. They go their way, and you go your own.

The peasant:

- They're truly the shaggy Devils.

The traveler:

- This is in vain: there's no point to condemn others. We must remember about ourselves.

The peasant:

- It is what it is.

A long silence. The farmer shakes his head in grins.

- Do you mean that if come together all at once, - meaning, push together, - and so the land will be ours, and we won't have any taxes?

The traveler:

- No, brother, that's not what I say. I don't say that once you live Godly, the land will be yours and you won't have to pay taxes, - but I say that our life is bad only because we ourselves live it badly. Would we live Godly, we wouldn't see the bad life. About what our lives would be like if lived Godly, only God knows, but only one is certain - that there would not be the bad life. We ourselves drink, swear, fight, sue, envy, hate people, don't accept the law of God, condemn people: call them either fat-bellied, or shaggy, but if we're lured with some coins, we are ready to go for any service: into watchmen, and police, and soldiers, and to desolate our own brother, ready to strangle and kill. We ourselves live diabolically, but complain at people.

The peasant:

- That's the truth. Only it's hard, so hard! Another time can't even endure.

The traveler:

- And for the soul, need to endure.

The peasant:

- It is like that! We live badly because we forget about God.

The traveler:

- That's the thing. And that's why our life is bad. And you often hear the strikers say: let's kill these and these noblemen, as everything happens because of them, and our life will become good. And they killed, and kill, and yet there's no use of that. The same is with the management: they say, 'only let us hang and torture in prisons thousand and more people, and our life will be good.' And before you know it, the life just gets worse.

The peasant:

- Yes it is so. It's impossible otherwise, need to do according the law.

The traveler:

- That's the thing. It's one or another: either serve God or the devil. Want to serve the devil - drink, curse, battle, hate, seek self-interest, listen not the God's law, but the human's, and life will be bad. But if you want to serve God, listen to Him alone: not only don't rob or kill, but also don't sue, don't hate, don't get into foul business, and you won't have a bad life.

Peasant (sighs):

- Well said, old man, very well, only we hear this too rare. If we only were guided more, it'd be a different story. But they'll come from the city, chat about how fixing their own businesses, chat strikingly but there's nothing to listen. Thank you, old man. Your speech is good.

So, where are you going to sleep? My wife is going to make your bed.

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